

Back in the days when moulded fibreglass first came on the boating scene, wild rumours were spread by eager manufacturers that the new miracle material was maintenance free. We now know of course, that this is simply not true.

A Laser is unique in that the deck and hull are bonded together to form a hollow shell, which in turn, becomes a natural air chamber for flotation. Emergency flotation is in the form of seven 'Cubitainer' polyethylene bottles inside the hull cavity. All Lasers built before hull number 14000, were fitted with foam blocks, encased in plastic bags. Both of these methods provide approximately the same amount of flotation (350 lbs).

The care of the Laser is minimal but some precautions are necessary as the Laser hull cannot be classified as 'heavy duty'. Although fibreglass by its nature is a strong and durable material, it is susceptible to physical and cosmetic damage.

Damages to the Gelcoat (the thin outer layer of colour) are the most apparent and easily repaired. Sunlight (ultraviolet rays) is one of the first things to attack a new fibreglass boat. The main symptom of sunlight damage is a dulling of the original colour, which then advances to a stage of appearing chalk-like. Preventative maintenance will avert colour fading. The best solution is to store the boat away from the sun when not in use, or if this is not possible, a good fabric cover will prolong the life of the Gelcoat and reduce maintenance. If you do not own a boat cover, a good coat of wax will inhibit sun fade. In fact, even if you do own a boat cover, it is strongly recommended that two good coats of clear wax be applied to the clean deck and hull of the boat. It preserves the finish and makes subsequent cleaning — particularly of the deck — a much easier task.

Restoring, Repairing and Cleaning

Cleaning: Cleaning a fibreglass boat is similar to the cleaning of a car. Detergent (do not use an abrasive cleanser, it can scratch your boat!) and warm water, along with a medium soft bristle brush, will take care of most dirt and stains. For those stubborn stains, a little xylol or acetone on a soft rag will do the trick. Warning: Do not allow the acetone to stay in contact with the Gelcoat for more than 30 seconds or so. The Gelcoat begins to soften when soaked with large spills of acetone. Xylol is preferable.

Restoring Colour from Sun Fade: There are several good products available that were designed specifically for this purpose. If the restoration involved is not too severe, these products will probably do a good job. However, if the Gelcoat has faded to the point of being chalk-like, it will take a lot of hard

work. If a liquid or paste restoring product does not work, then you must use more drastic measures. First, try gently applying a mild rubbing compound, carefully following the directions on the label.

If that does not work, the next step is the wet/dry sandpaper route. Start with 600 grade wet/dry paper, using lots of water, and begin to rub away the chalkiness, down to the fresh Gelcoat. Remember, a fresh piece of wet/dry sandpaper eats Gelcoat for breakfast! Be careful not to be over-zealous. Do not use wet/dry paper to clean the deck or the non-skid pattern will be wiped away with prolonged sanding. This would make your boat illegal under the Class Rules. Finish with the finest grade sandpaper you can find (1000 if possible) and follow sanding with polishing and buffing with a fine compound.

Repairs: If you are not confident of your skills with fibreglass, and your Laser has been holed by a collision, head for your nearest reputable repair shop. Here are some tips for minor repairs to Gelcoat.

Done properly, minor repairs are quick, simple and inexpensive. Knowing how to make these repairs is as much a part of sailing as tacking or gybing. Please read on carefully and completely before attempting any repairs.

Scratches: Often it is possible to eliminate by simply wetsanding them out and polishing the sanded surface. Complete details may be found below.

Patches to be made on hull: Tools that are required are: chisel, small putty knife, wet sandpaper (grades 400, 800 and 1000), bucket of water, clean rags, Gelcoat, catalyst, wax compound, (such as Dursol or Mirror Glaze), dry sandpaper (grades 60 and 80), a couple of coffee sticks, scotch tape.

- Step 1 Eliminate all loose Gelcoat around patch with chisel. This may not be necessary — check carefully. Only take off loose material.
- Step 2 Sand area off patch to provide rough surface.
- Step 3 Clean area to be patched with a rag soaked with acetone and allow to dry thoroughly.
- Step 4 Mix a small amount of Gelcoat with catalyst. The ratio of the mixture should be two parts catalyst to one hundred parts Gelcoat (2%).
- Step 5 After stirring the mix very thoroughly with the coffee stick, apply to damaged area making an up and down motion until the patch